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U.S. Aide Denies Impropriety in Arms Sale Case

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The State Department yesterday denied any improper U.S. role in the activities of a Vermont firm which, in violation of the arms embargo imposed on South Africa, sold U.S. Army weapons to the Pretoria government.

William Robinson, head of the department's Office of Munitions Control, said the case was investigated; "the suspected culprits were indicted, pleaded guilty... and served time in a federal corrections facility."

"This matter was handled in accordance with standard procedure and resulted in prosecution of the violators," Robinson told the House African affairs subcommittee.

"The State Department, therefore, considers that the SRC case was properly and successfully conducted."

SRC is the Space Research Corp. of North Troy, Vt., which was accused of violating U.S. law and the U.N. arms embargo against South Africa—which Washington supports—by selling arms to South Africa.

According to a subcommittee staff report issued last week, SRC made the sales and shipments to South Africa between April, 1976, and September, 1978. The shipment included 60,000 155mm long-range artillery shells and four 155mm guns.

"Almost all of the equipment sent to South Africa was acquired in the United States, mainly from U.S. Army plants and supply stocks," said the staff report, which hinted at an indirect CIA role in the transactions.

"According to the preponderance of evidence," the report said, "it is probable that a U.S. defense consultant who was assisting the CIA's covert action program in Angola—and was under the supervision of a CIA officer—planned with South Africa government officials shipments of U.S.-origin arms to South Africa for use in Angola."

In a statement to the committee, Robinson did not address the alleged CIA link suggested by the staff report. But he stressed strong continued U.S. support for the arms embargo.